Approved For Release 2007/08/20 : CIA-RDP99-00498R000100120113-6

STAT

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 270

THE NATION
24 September 1977

Carter's Way with Congress

GREG RUSHFORD

President Carter's temporary withdrawal on July 28 of his proposal to sell seven AWACS aircraft to Iran avoided, for the time being at least, a humiliating defeat in his first serious foreign policy clash with Congress. Those of us who worked during June and July to block the sale enjoyed the victory, but the administration has resubmitted the deal, somewhat modified, and it may now gain Congressional approval. Simply put, the President suffered a defeat because he demonstrated the kind of Chief Executive arrogance and incompetence he had campaigned against. Worse, he did not take advantage of the Congressional recess to reflect on lessons learned. It appears we are in for another Congress-White House clash at a time when Carter, with more important issues such as Panama on his hands, doesn't need it.

The dispute turns on the wisdom of selling seven AWACS to Iran for $1.2 billion. AWACS is a Boeing 707 jet, packed with more than $100 million in sophisticated radar, communications and computer gear. One's opinion of whether or not Iran should get this plane depends upon one's answer to a number of questions. Is Iran able to master its technology and not risk the lives of American specialists in case of war? What of the possibility that the Russians might acquire AWACS's sensitive secret through espionage or defection? Would other weapons systems, notably Grumman's E2-C Hawkeye, better fit Iran's needs? How would Iran's neighbors react to the sale? What weight should be given to the benefit to our Air Force, which, understandably, wants to reduce its costs by finding a rich foreign buyer? Like all public policy questions there is room for reasonable debate—something we haven't had over our Iranian policy for a long time.

Nixon, when he stopped in Teheran on his way home from Moscow in May 1972, promised the Shah virtually any U.S. weapon Iran desired. The Nixon deal was a well-guarded secret, and by the time Congress discovered it in 1974, our arms program was already out of control. The key element of the deal was the solitary way in which Nixon made it, without consulting the policy-planning elements of his administration.

During the recent AWACS dispute, it almost seemed that Nixon had won the election. One Senator wrote to Carter in May to express his strong concern about the AWACS sale. He might have supported Carter if given a reason, but, instead, he received a curt note from Frank Moore, Carter's Congressional liaison, who referred the matter to Secretary of State Vance, who in July sent a brush-off note from the State Department's Congressional liaison. Another Senator wrote to National Security Adviser Brzezinski, only to receive a similar nonresponse. Finally, Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd was so angered by this apparent disrespect for the legislative branch that he corralled the votes to beat Carter in the Senate.

This attitude was and still is puzzling. In the first place, it seems the President was victimized by bad staff work. The Pentagon, which had long planned to push AWACS, rushed the deal past Carter in the first three months of the new administration. When examined by the General Accounting Office pursuant to a Congressional request, the basic Defense Department studies were shown to be flawed, incomplete and biased in favor of AWACS and against its alternatives. But one staffer at the National Security Council admits to having approved those plans, *unread*, for Brzezinski, who apparently made the same mistake. The State Department was absorbed in planning new arms sales policies (which would exclude AWACS), and lacked the time or expertise to analyze the proposal. The Arms Control Agency also fell under the Pentagon steamroller. Nobody asked the CIA for an intelligence analysis of the security risks (Congress did so, but later), and the military intelligence estimates were bland and sloppy. It was May 1972 all over again.

A special word needs to be said about the CIA's role. The AWACS issue has provided the first public suggestion that the Carter administration has attempted to tamper with intelligence output. Although they had not bothered to ask for an independent intelligence report, Secretaries Vance and Harold Brown, and Brzezinski at the White House, were openly annoyed when Director of Central Intelligence Turner, in response to a Congressional request, wrote a detailed and sophisticated analysis of AWACS's security problems for the General Accounting Office. There is strong evidence from executive branch sources that Vance and Brzezinski then pressured Turner to write the GAO a second letter in July, backing off from that analysis to support administration policy. To his credit, Turner seems to have resisted such crude pressures—or perhaps they evaporated for awhile when Congress and the press got wind of them. However, according to *The Washington Star*, Brown wrote Carter a memorandum on August 29 providing reassurances on the security issue "designed to give him [Turner] an excuse to get on board" with the policy team. Such disregard for the integrity of impartial intelligence analysis is particularly disturbing from Vance and Brown, who should have learned from similar practices during the era of Vietnam, when both served under Johnson.

If Carter's aides had demonstrated that they had soberly considered all aspects of the AWACS sale it doubtless would have sailed through Congress. It must have embarrassed Secretary Vance to testify before the House International Relations Committee with Senator Culver, and realize that the Iowa Senator had turned the committee's vote against AWACS because he had a better grasp of the details than did the Secretary of State.

President Carter can stop this dangerous incompetence at once by simply insisting on a thorough policy review of the AWACS sale. But he had best act quickly. In answer to a private letter to the President in early August, signed by twenty-one Senators and asking for an in-depth study of alternatives to AWACS, the State and Defense Departments have prepared a superficial gloss for Congress. As to the study's thoroughness, the GAO informed Congress on August 26: it is "clear that the study objective is to rejustify seven AWACS." This will surely raise Congressional hackles once again, but as one State Department official who opposes the AWACS sale told me, "Look, this is the President's policy; I'm not about to risk my neck by proposing alternatives when it will do no good."

Until Carter can show that he is in full control of a competent foreign policy and defense team, Congress has the obligation to continue rejecting such deals.

Greg Rushford, a Washington-based journalist, was recently an aide to Sen. Thomas Eagleton, a leader in the Congressional fight to block the AWACS sale to Iran.

Approved For Release 2007/08/20 : CIA-RDP99-00498R000100120113-6